

The Grey Shirts and the Jews.

SOUTH AFRICAN PRESS COMMENT.

"The Friend."

"The hearing of the case," says the Bloemfontein "Friend" in an editorial on the 23rd August on the Grey Shirt Libel Case, "produced some remarkable evidence of the unplumbed depths of anti-Semitic prejudice dominating the Grey Shirt movement and the blind credulity on which it trades. More startling than that, however, was the exposure of the utterly unscrupulous methods employed by some of its accredited agents to promote their aims.

"The finding of the Supreme Court was that the documents were forgeries and that 'they bore the unmistakable imprint of having been compiled by a member or members of the Grey Shirt movement,' with the obvious intention of rousing popular passions against the Jewish population in South Africa. The Court could not concern itself with the larger aspects of the case, or take into consideration the widespread mischief which might have resulted from the publication of the forgeries. Indeed, as the Bench suggests, the perpetrators of the libel believed that the very comprehensiveness of their onslaught would give them immunity. In their defence, they pleaded that their action was directed not at any individual but at a class. Unfortunately for them, they over-reached themselves in their desire to impart additional venom to the attack. The Court held that defamation had been inferred, and awarded exemplary damages against the principal defendants.

"The law has vindicated the reputation of an individual citizen, and incidentally it has struck a shrewd blow at a movement which, in the name of Christianity, preaches un-Christian intolerance and unashamed race persecution. One is left to speculate, however, what would have happened if the plaintiff in the case had been unable to establish that he personally had been besmirched by the libel. Apparently it might have been difficult, if not impossible, under the ordinary processes of the law, to stop the circulation of the incendiary statements. Even now, there is nothing to prevent the Grey Shirts from broadcasting similar calumnies provided they manage to keep on the right side of the libel law. The Port Elizabeth case has thus emphasised the anomalous position that while the individual's rights are protected, it is open to unscrupulous persons to bring a whole class—that is, large numbers of citizens—into odium by the spread of calculated libels of the type exposed by the Grahamstown Court.

"The damage done by the defamation of one man is, as a rule, of limited scope. A race or class libel is capable of inflicting untold harm; yet the law is almost powerless to check it. It is not easy, perhaps, to legislate in such circumstances. That it is not impracticable is shown by the Union law which treats as a punishable offence the stirring up of ill-feeling between European and non-Europeans. The Port Elizabeth case raises the question whether the time has not arrived to consider the extension of these provisions to embrace the whole gamut of inter-racial agitation. That is quite apart from the question whether, in the light of the Port Elizabeth revelations, it is not high time that the 'shirt' nuisance was firmly dealt with by the authorities."

"Natal Advertiser."

"There will be general satisfaction among fair-minded people at the judgment given by Sir Thomas Graham in the Grahamstown Supreme Court when substantial damages were awarded the Rev. Abraham Levy against certain leaders of the Grey Shirt movement in respect of defamation arising from the publication of a document alleged to have been stolen from a Port Elizabeth Synagogue," the "Natal Advertiser" states in its editorial in its issue of August 23rd. "The document was a particularly offensive one. The attempt to foist it on the Synagogue was a singularly stupid one. The temper in which the entire transaction was conceived and carried out was wholly obnoxious to any canons of public decency and morals, and could only proceed from people who were willing to go any lengths in their insensate desire to inflame opinion on anti-Semitic lines. The punishments meted out, though severe, are not too severe. If this kind of political calumny is not to spread and corrupt other centres further afield than Port Elizabeth it must be stamped out at its birth, and the courage and common sense of Sir Thomas Graham have, we believe, done much to achieve this result.

"It might be argued that the stupid and cruel fiction circulated by these Grey Shirt leaders might have been allowed to carry its own condemnation on the surface, and that the Rev. Levy could well have ignored a fabrication that was so palpably a forgery. If we were living in normal times with normal people about us this argument might avail. Unhappily organised political prejudice was never before so venomous as it is to-day and even in liberty-loving South Africa there are tens of thousands of people who are prepared to believe the most monstrous things of their political opponents. The Jew, we all know, is in many respects a hyper-sensitive person. His historical background makes him so, for he has tasted to the full on many occasions the unbridled persecution of the Christian; a persecution often set afoot by slanders as stupid and baseless as this Grey Shirt effort. It is all very well people telling him that South Africa will never tolerate the kind of thing that is popular in Germany nowadays, and that no doubt the Grey Shirts would like to make popular out here. The Jew is safe from persecution in the larger towns of South Africa. But if the kind of calumny that was recently set afoot by Von Moltke and his associates is allowed to proceed unchecked in more sparsely peopled parts of the land, some wild and woolly Grey Shirt is going to better the tactics of his leaders and start a trouble that may have very serious repercussions where least expected. The minister-in-charge at Port Elizabeth was well advised to invoke the protection of the courts at the outset of this palpably anti-Semitic campaign, and it is to be hoped that the salutary sentences will bring would-be persecutors up with a round turn. South Africa has had its own internecine quarrels for a long time past, and the air is not quite clear of them all yet. But it has never, so far, gone in for religious persecution; and so long as men have obeyed its laws they have been as free as any men anywhere else in the British

(Continued in Third Column).

Sinister Rumours.

To the Editor,
S.A. Jewish Chronicle.

After reading the two letters of appreciation appearing in your last issue for the work done by the Board of Jewish Education, it is very baffling for me to understand the true reasons why no inspection was held at the Muizenberg Talmud Torah.

There are sinister rumours afloat that the services of the Board's representative were refused and that actually he was not given admittance to the Talmud Torah neither to examine the children nor to report upon the progress made since the last examination.

If these facts are true, and it seems to me that they must be so, then the committee of the Muizenberg Talmud Torah must be censured for not availing themselves of this signal opportunity for a consultation with a noted pedagogue such as Dr. Birnbaum is. It is generally known to residents that there is a great deal of improvement to be effected in the Talmud Torah.—I am, etc.,

"RESIDENT."

Incongruity at Marriage Ceremonies.

To the Editor,
S.A. Jewish Chronicle.

Sir,—A correspondent of the English "Jewish Chronicle" draws attention to the incongruity of the recent performance of Mozart's "Requiem" at a memorial service for Bialik.

May I draw the attention of your readers in general and that of our South African Cantors in particular to a similar incongruity. Why at our marriage ceremonies the "Wedding March" from "Lohengrin" of Wagner—a pronounced anti-Semite? Is there, then, such a lack of Jewish compositions?—I am, etc.,

ISRAEL LEVINSON,
Principal,
Hillel College.

[Owing to pressure on our space we have been compelled to hold over several letters received this week.—Ed.]

(Continued from Second Column).

Commonwealth. It will be a sad day when things out here are otherwise.

"It is too much to hope that this case will spell the end of the Grey Shirt movement. It has been reported recently from the Cape that the Grey Shirts are soon to become the Black Shirts. Names have little significance in this age of political tomfoolery. Grey, Black, Green or Brown, the problem is still the same. What is in peril to-day from them all is the spirit of liberalism; that wide catholicity of opinion which allows men to differ in their private views while agreeing to safeguard the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness to all who are willing to obey the laws of the land they live in. Persecution is a monstrous political instrument happily foreign to Dutch and English alike. Unhappily there is so much ignorance abroad nowadays that it is not enough to leave it to the good sense of the majority to curb the stupidities of the few extremists who march behind banners bearing strange devices. This is why the Courts stand foursquare to protect Jew and Gentile alike from the sort of practices the Grey Shirts evidently believe in!"